

# THE WALKING QUESTION MARK

Newsletter of the Grand River Heritage Mines Society

Always Digging For Answers

September, October, November, December 2001

Vol. 9, Issue #3

## COMING EVENTS

**Trip to Hagersville Mine** - Canadian Gypsum Company will be on Sept. 11, 9:30 a.m. Only 6 persons allowed down the mine. More can tour the plant. Phone Ilse for arrangements

**Trip to Canadian Drilling Rig Museum**  
I'm sorry the wrong date was given in the last newsletter. The visit to their **Open House** is on September 16<sup>th</sup> For more information about how to get there and pooling rides, phone Ilse.

*9/23/01*  
**Fall Field Trips:** The first outing will be on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, rain date Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>. This will be a combined hike by members of the Northwest Gateway group, members of Brant Environmental Advisory Network and the GRH Mines Society. Meet at the parking lot by Westcast Foundry (Powerline Rd. on the east side of the river). Bring lunch, camera and notebook, clipboard, etc. Members will do an inventory for an Environmental Impact Study in this expanding industrial area. Other outings for fall to be arranged. Phone Ilse for details.

**Our Christmas pot luck party** will be at 6 p.m. at Ilse's on December 1st.

## BITS AND PIECES

By Jean Farquharson, Ed.

Congratulations! We are now **officially affiliated with the Ontario Historical Society**. This means that we have an official registration number with the Ministry of Consumer and Corporate Affairs giving us status as a **non-profit incorporated group**. As long as we follow their rules, we can remain incorporated. This gives us status when we want to apply for a grant - one step nearer to publishing our mining history!

Attendance at our **Annual Meeting** on May 26<sup>th</sup> in York was lower than anticipated, especially since we had visitors from the **Ontario Historical Society - Jo Marie Powers** and her husband, from Guelph - with us to observe how we carry on our meetings. We gave our annual reports and had our annual election. We have the same directors as before, with Jean F. moving up as Chairman, Lou Knechtel as Secretary. Al F. as Treasurer, Ilse K. as Membership Secretary, Cathy M. as Interim Vice Chair, Mike O'Byrne as Director. Barbara Topp agreed to audit the books for the year.

We adopted the use of an indemnity release form for field trips which every

member will be required to sign. It will also serve as an attendance form for the records of each field trip. It was decided that if ever there was an accident, a report would have to be kept on file and signed by witnesses. (See form on page 8.) We also formally adopted our Constitution.

After the business part of the meeting was over, the audience was invited to contribute on the theme about **People and Families Involved with Gypsum**. We had some interesting accounts related by various members and visitors:

**Barbara Topp** explained how she was related to people who worked in both the Carson and the North Cayuga mines. She displayed a letter book from the **Grand River Plaster Company**, 1889-90, from which she read extracts - prices of gypsum, wages of miners, purchase of a calcining kettle from Toronto, sawmills set up to produce sawn logs to shore up the mine shafts. She spoke of the **Walton family** involvement in the mines, and the tragedy of the two Walton children who died when they blew up the powder house at Gypsum Mines. Members of the Walton family ran the store and were the postmasters at Gypsum Mines.

**Mary Martindale** spoke of the mining history around York and Mount Healy. The **Martindale family** came from England. When they reached Quebec they built a boat and used it to reach Niagara where they met some cousins, and then went to work on the Welland Canal. A cholera epidemic struck about that time. Then later they came to work

the gypsum mines and bought the farm where the **Martindale Mine** was located. The **Martindale brothers** and the **Donaldsons** were involved with the early mines and mills around Mount Healy and York. She recalled the thunderous explosion when the Martindale mine was blasted. Mary also talked about **A.W. Thompson** who was involved both at Mount Healy and with the Excelsior Mine at Gypsum Mines.

**Burt Taylor** talked about the **Chrysler family** which came from Palatine Germany and Sweden and settled on the Chrysler farm. Burt's mother was a Chrysler, the same family that built the Chrysler car. The Chryslers at the Battle of Chrysler Farm near Cornwall were members of the same family. Annie Chrysler was a teacher. He referred to an newspaper article to which he has access. The **Chrysler Cave** is said to be five miles long, and people used a long ball of string to find their way out of the cave. It is now sealed up to keep people out after a man was lost in the caves for three days before escaping. There were two limestone kilns on the Chrysler farm. Could there have been gypsum mining activity on the farm?

**Bruce Hill**, author of **The Grand River Navigation Company**, commented on how the Grand River Navigation Company served the needs of the gypsum industry as a cheap means of transportation for moving the gypsum down river and connecting to markets in the U.S. and elsewhere in Ontario. When the railroads came in, the GRNC went bankrupt.

**DONATION:** Mary Martindale has contributed two articles for our archives about **Alex W. Thompson** of Mount Healy, who started the **Excelsior Mine**. One article has a description of a supper meeting and presentation held by friends in Mt. Healy to pay tribute to Thompson when he and his family moved to Hagersville. The second article describes how he died when he fell off a train, and relates his funeral and a short biography.

Fitting in well with the theme of our annual meeting, the following letter was received by Ilse and submitted:

### **MEMORIES OF GYPSUM MINES**

July 11, 2001

by **Mrs. Bernice Owens Pollard**

Between Cayuga and Dunnville on the River Road [was the village of Gypsum Mines.] There is one house left standing on this property - the house my grandfather and grandmother lived in, **John and Margaret Walton**. Their youngest child, Edith Margaret (Owens) was my mother and I spent part of each summer holiday there. The mine was closed by then. It was a little west of the house still standing.

The Walton family came from England. Margaret Dolan, my grandmother, came from Ireland very young. On reaching Canada, she was an orphan. A family who had a small hotel in Cayuga took her in. Margaret (Dolan) Walton, born Ireland 1852, married John Walton in 1868 at age 16. She died in 1936 and is buried in Windecker Cemetery on River Road.

The John Waltons had a large family.

My mother was the youngest. A very young sister and brother were burnt to death in the mine before she was born. They put an explosive in a pea shooter and lit it. [See Barb Topp's story.] My father was the telegrapher at Cayuga Station. My mother was born at Gypsum Mines, and delivered mail by horse and buggy till she was married.

I spent my summers visiting my grandparents at Gypsum Mines, in the home still standing. Grandpa's brother lived across the road. Grandfather had walnut trees and built furniture. He also had a blacksmith shop and fixed wagons, etc. (no horses). I remember a root cellar and lovely garden. In her younger years, Grandma had a horse and buggy. We used to fish in the river and eat the fish. Milk came from the Waltons across the road, also the Brandts. Aunt Mary Schroepel was the only child living when Grandma Walton died. She flew from Mt. Carroll, Illinois, for the funeral and settled the estate.

I'm 90 years old and loved reading the story of Gypsum Mines in the *Expositor*.

### **MAP AND TOUR GUIDE OF GRAND ERIE COUNTRY AVAILABLE TO**

**MEMBERS:** If you wish a free copy of this excellent map, ask Jean F. A few are available first come first served.

### **WE WELCOME A NEW MEMBER**

We welcome **Rae Tomlinson** to our Society. Rae lives in Binbrook and is a retired history teacher. He is also the Secretary for the York Grand River Historical Society. We look forward to having you at our meetings and on our field trips, Rae.

## TIDBITS ABOUT GYPSUM

While surfing the net, I found the following interesting information from various websites about gypsum:

**HOW MANY PLACES IN THE WORLD NAMED GYPSUM?** Here are some of them in North America:

[Of course] **Gypsum Mines**, now a ghost village south of **Cayuga, Ontario**. [This was not listed on the Internet.]

**Gypsum, Colorado**, Pop. 1750: on their own website I found a page advertising *Gypsum Daze: A Small Town Celebration*.

**Gypsum, Kansas**, in **Saline County**, Colorado, pop. 365.

**Gypsum, New York**, **Ontario County**.

**Gypsum, Ohio**, in **Ottawa County**.

**Gypsum Mill, Utah**, in **Juab County**, elev. 5,255 ft.

### AGRICULTURAL GYPSUM

You may recall that our historical research showed gypsum was used as a soil fertilizer for centuries, long before commercial fertilizers were used, and the early settlers called it "land plaster". It is interesting to know it is still in demand.

On its website, CGC is advertising Agricultural Gypsum. Available all year round in any quantity by the bag or in bulk, ground fine or coarse.

Benefits:

- Improves water penetration and retention.
- Improves soil tilth, neutralizes sodic soils
- Increases the availability of nutrients in the soil
- Increases yields from problem soils
- Supplies sulphate sulphur without affecting soil pH

### CALEDONIA MINE USED AS BANQUET HALL

Difficult to believe today but in Aug. 1913 about 40 delegates to the International Geological Congress sat down to a banquet in the Caledonia Mine. This was just one such occasion. Apparently banquets were held often in the mine for up to sixty people, hosting dealers to promote products. The temperature in the mine is said to remain at 55 degrees, winter or summer, a cool environment for a sit-down banquet. [Note: We have an interesting photo in our archives to prove this.]

From Barbara Martindale - July 27, 1999. *The Gypsum Story, Part 3*, in [The Grand Sackem](#).

### RECYCLING GYPSUM

We are always glad to know that waste is being reused and not going into dump sites:

**Ontario Power Generation** reported: "In 1999, we sold over 730,000 tones of coal ash and gypsum by-products produced at our fossil-fuelled stations to be used in wall board."

**New West Gypsum Recycling (Ont) Inc** is a business advertising on the Internet. Their address is in Oakville.

#### **MR. GYPSUM**

You may remember one of our guest speakers a few years ago was Ray Hartviksen, a consulting engineer from Woodstock, who among other accomplishments, was chief mining engineer at Domtar, in Caledonia. He also opened and developed the Westroc mine at Drumbo, a \$5.5 million project. He now has his resume on his own website - **Mr. Gypsum**.

#### **DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU EAT GYPSUM?**

Gypsum (calcium sulphate) serves the food, beverage and pharmaceutical industries as an economical source of supplemental calcium. This product is used in enriched flour and breads, cereals, baking powder, yeast foods, bread conditioners, canned vegetables and artificially sweetened jellies and preserves.

In beer manufacturing, the calcium ion, together with the needed buffering action as provided by proper water correction, promotes proper gelatinization of the starch in the cooker mash, as well as protein degradation and starch conversion. Thus yield in the main mash is increased. In addition the colour of the wort is improved, and better precipitation and flocculation of undesirable protein complexes are achieved. The result is paler, smoother-tasting beer with improved stability and shelf life.

For pharmaceutical applications, calcium sulphate is extensively used as a dilutant serving as an excellent extender while it supplies dietary calcium.

An anhydrous form of calcium sulphate is made by high temperature calcining of select, high-purity gypsum which is then ground and air-separated into a white powder. Because of its whiteness, it is used successfully to extend Titanium oxide in white cake icings at a much lower cost. This filler also functions as a stabilizer and supplies enrichment calcium.

[Not my words, but quoted from: Canadian Gypsum Company website [www.cgcinc.com](http://www.cgcinc.com)]

## **FIELD TRIPS**

### **MOUNT OLIVET**

Reported by Ilse Kraemer

All winter, we had looked forward to springtime research at **Mt. Olivet**, to discover spring vegetation and other unknown things. Many people came out on May 21<sup>st</sup>. The owner of the property had sold it in the meantime, and was in the process of moving out. Although spring was very wet, the morning looked good. We visited the farm and waterfall cave and admired the dwarf lilacs. They were in full bloom in brilliant white, red, purple, and a deep red, nearly black. We were half-way through the farm property when the sky opened up. We were soon soaked. Some of the group stayed in the barn, others went to their cars, and since the rain did not stop, we went home very disappointed.

In July, on one of the hottest days, I went back there alone. By this time,

every plant was dried up, even the strange curly grass. I found a lot of fossils, a second quarry. The strange bushes are pin cherries (dwarf) and some look like bushes, but have enormous size stems. The Chinquapin Oaks were doing great, with many small ones - a good sign. We must try to go back next spring.

## **GORDON/TAYLOR FARM**

One of our spring field trips as reported by Jean Farquharson and Ilse Kraemer

**Research:** The mine was located on a farm at the South part of the north half of lots 11-16, Concession 2, Brantford Township, Brant County. The farm house was named **Cottisbrook Cottage** (cottage on a creek/brook) . First owned by brothers **Thos.** and **Wm. Gordon**, sons of Francis Gordon (he also owned **Gilston Farm**). At some time during the 34 years the brothers owned Cottisbrook, gypsum was mined from the ground. It also belonged to the Cox family - Capt. Peter Cox. From: **Whiteman's Creek Women's Institute Tweedsmuir History**

E& OE (Errors and Omissions excluded)

According to Gwen Parkhill, Fred Taylor was an orphan who came from Wales, married Ruth Peart. The family lived on the farm after the Gordons. They had a son, and a daughter who became a school teacher.

### **Other research to be done:**

See maps of early history of the area - 1833, 1839, Tremaine 1858, and well records. *Historical Atlas of Brant County (1875)* indicated the property was owned by Peter Martin. There were no

mine records on file from MNDM.

## **FIELD TRIP TO FARM June 3, 2001**

Our long overdue outing was attended by Lou Knechtel, Ilse Kraemer, and Jean Farquharson. It was difficult to find ruins or any mines because of the rapid and heavy growth of vegetation owing to the heavy spring rains. That day the rain held off to a sprinkle for awhile before the downpour started and cut our trip short. No buildings remained on site. There is supposed to be a well on the property [See map below].

There seemed to be the remnants of two farms. We discovered ruins of a barn - old concrete and stone walls on the north side of the property. There was an old orchard further south and remnants of a garden - lily of the valley and about 300 feet of sedum growing wild along the edge of the field. We also saw two Indian trail marker trees.

There was a large upper field, and then an old beach ridge which led to a field in a lower level. There was another deep ridge, steep and wooded, which led to the flood plain. It was heavily treed, with black oak, huge wild sweet cherry, enormous white pine, one with a trunk 7 feet in circumference, shagbark hickory, black walnut, and locust trees. We discovered a stand of really beautiful high bushes, nearly the height of trees. We had never seen anything like it - lovely shiny leaves, the tips reddish. Well, we picked some for identification at home later. What a shock! It was poison sumac. This variety is not common in our area, only at the Sudden Tract and around Port Stanley. They

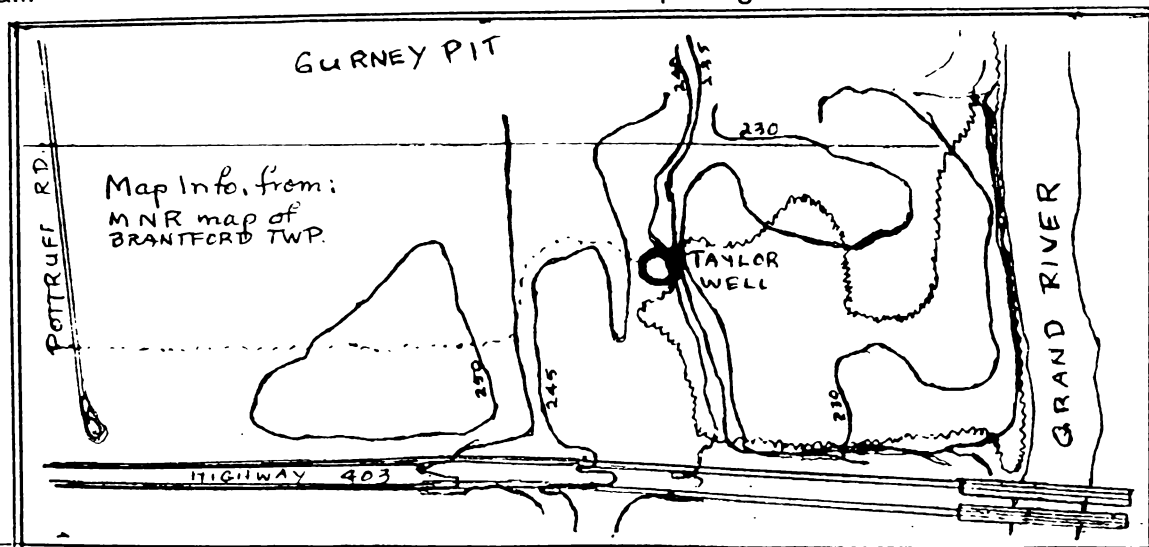
are said to grow to 50 feet in height. We were lucky to escape skin rash! A lesson to be careful in the future. It is suggested by naturalists that we wear latex gloves to handle unfamiliar leaves because of the way we may react to some of these wild plants.

Lou went down the steep embankment just north of Highway 403 and found bedrock and deeply eroded v-shaped ravines - collapsed mining tunnels? . Since the grass and underbrush was nearly up to our shoulders, and we were wet to the skin we left it for another day - another disappointment. We will need to return when the vegetation is less heavy to determine where the gypsum was mined. It may have been quarried out rather than dug from tunnels.

After this trip, the weather became too hot and humid for field research until fall.

## THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE STEAM SHOW August, 5<sup>th</sup> ,6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>

This was a success, as always. Even with the heat, our booth was busy. Thank you to all the members who came out to set up and take down the display and supervise our display. Ilse had a special display about the Caledonia Mine, in memory of Richard Murphy, and one on the Cayuga Mine in memory of Ron Belliveau. Jean had two new displays - on the Caledonia and the Carson Mines. Again, we met oldtimers and heard a lot of stories about old gypsum mines. We had a visit with Mr. Charlie Landers, owner of property along the Grand River at West River Road in Paris, and whom we visited around 1994 to see one of the old mines. We should go back there sometime and see what has happened in the meantime - cave-ins, more tunnel openings?



This newsletter is edited by Jean Farquharson. We are not responsible for errors. We are looking for more information about the mining industry in Southern Ontario. Submissions are welcome. Please send **correspondence** to Jean Farquharson, R.R.3, Paris ON N3L 3E3. Phone 519/442-2156. Fax 519/442-2373. E-mail [allanf@golden.net](mailto:allanf@golden.net). For **membership inquiries**, contact Ilse Kraemer, 23 KingsHill Lane, Brantford ON N3T 6A3. Phone 519-756-6634.

# Grand River Heritage Mines Society Waiver and Assumption of Risk

Please read this Waiver carefully.

I, in consideration of the Grand River Heritage Mines Society allowing me to accompany them on this trip, hereby agree to release, save harmless and indemnify the Grand River Heritage Mines Society, its officers, directors, its agents, and members from and against all claims, actions, costs and expenses in respect to death, injury, loss or damages to me or my property arising as a result of my participation in this trip, notwithstanding that the same may have been contributed to or occasioned by the negligence of the Grand River Heritage Mines Society, its officers, directors, agents and members.

I affirm that I am in good health, capable of participating in this trip, and I accept as my personal risk the consequences of such participation.

I agree to follow the safety instructions and other rules of the Grand River Heritage Mines Society.

I will not participate with this trip if I am under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

In the event of an accident or medical problem suffered by me, I consent to the Grand River Heritage Mines Society seeking out the appropriate medical care required.

I declare this Waive and Assumption of risk is binding on me, my heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns.

I have read this Waiver and Assumption of Risk and I fully understand all aspects of it.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

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